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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a design for a public school academy, the Louisiana Leadership Academy, which provides a total immersion environment primarily for youth from disadvantaged backgrounds. Success is contingent upon choice and community support. Objectives are to: (1) build self-discipline and self-respect; (2) raise up leaders who will transform their communities; (3) produce high school graduates who exceed world-class academic standards and are prepared for lifetime learning; (4) prepare students for gainful employment and active citizenship; and (5) provide a safe, structured environment. Targeting the urban innercity where conventional school designs have failed, the academy model seeks to remove the student from a destructive environment and to provide community services. Information is provided on the following features of the school: grade levels; governance; building facilities; classroom arrangement; schedules; student-selection procedures; the health clinic; curriculum; school maintenance; cohort competition field days; disciplinary policy; uniforms; teacher-selection process; counseling; awards; substance abuse regulations; and budgeting. (Contains 19 references.) (LMI)

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**LOUISIANA LEADERSHIP ACADEMY:
A MODEL SCHOOL DESIGN
(working paper)**

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**A model school design proposal presented at the annual meeting of the American
Educational Research Association, Atlanta, GA, April 13, 1993.**

Louisiana Leadership Academy:

A Model School Design

The Need

A call has been issued for a new generation of schools which are "light years beyond" our current schools, and which help all children prepare for responsible citizenship, life-long learning, and productive employment. Our public school academy design, which provides a "total immersion environment", realistically promises such an outcome.

. . . schools as they are presently organized must be overhauled in ways that fundamentally change the institution of schooling itself (O'Neil, 1990, p.5).

We believe that the time has come for a public school which stresses structure, develops pride and character through the development of self-discipline, and contributes directly to its community. Schools similar in concept, such as some parochial schools and military academies, already exist, and have proven their worth. However, these schools generally service only those who can afford to pay the high costs of private instruction. Many who could most benefit from this type of educational setting have been by and large excluded, especially inner-city youth who come from disproportionately poor, abusive, and educationally deprived environments.

Our design team believes that the implementation of our Leadership Academy design would produce students who not only meet, but exceed the high educational

goals established by America and Louisiana 2000. Furthermore, we believe that our concept would have the greatest impact on students, parents, and neighborhoods from the lower socioeconomic strata of Louisiana. There is a line of research which unambiguously demonstrates a strong relationship between successful schools and schools of choice (Raywid, 1989; Hill, Foster, & Gendler, 1992). We acknowledge that our academy design would serve some students better than others, and consequently believe that the success of a school modeled after our concept would be contingent on its being *freely chosen by parents and students*. Moreover, since a successful school must have the support of its community (Hill, Wise, & Shapiro, 1989), the LLA would ideally be a community school which has the strong support of community parents and leaders.

Objectives

Many current school designs, as laudable as they may be, do not go beyond the effective transmission of knowledge from teacher to student. What sets the Leadership Academy concept apart from even the most successful of the "effective schools" designs is that it goes far beyond the efficient transmission of knowledge. It will do this, but it will also do much more. The Leadership Academy concept is designed to accomplish the following objectives:

- 1) Build self-discipline and self-respect in all students.***
- 2) Raise up leaders who will transform their communities.***
- 3) Produce students who exit the 12th grade exceeding world class standards in English, mathematics, science, history, and geography, who are prepared for lifetime learning.***

4) Prepare students for gainful employment and active involvement as contributing citizens to their communities and country.

5) Provide a safe, structured environment within which learning and living will take place.

Our Leadership Academy concept is comprehensive in scope. It provides for all of the needs of those students whose basic requirements for successful living are neither being met in conventional public schools nor in the home environment. The critical needs of the American underclass are desperate and growing worse. It is our belief, therefore, that drastic, yet proven measures, are required that will reverse the hopelessness of our most impoverished communities. The assurance of a promising future for all citizens in the United States is inseparably linked with drastically enhancing its needy youths' quality of life, and in turn providing them with the same opportunities to achieve and excel accorded to this country's most affluent citizens.

It is also our belief that investment in a Leadership Academy school would yield dividends far in excess of the operational costs. The Leadership Academy would not only prepare its students for a productive, healthy, and meaningful life, but it would equip these students to contribute to and improve their home communities in ways that offer a realistic chance of breaking the intergenerational transfer of poverty and despair.

Philosophy

At the heart of our philosophy is the notion that for some individuals, conventional schools are not adequate enough to overcome the many negative

influences which impact the individual and outweigh any of the school's positive effects. To the extent that a positive, controlled environment replaces the negative home and community environment, the likelihood of success with the individual will increase.

Many students come from environments where even the basics of self-discipline, self-respect, and self-worth are never acquired. Millions of American children are raised in environments where drugs, disintegrated families, abject poverty, inadequate health care or any combination of these factors are their everyday reality. It is our belief that the acquisition of the basic building blocks of personality and character must occur simultaneously with any attempt to seriously bring many of these youngsters up to "world class" standards. Indeed, without self-discipline -- the internal motivation to do what is necessary simply because it must be done -- meaningful learning is neither likely to take place, nor continue over the lifetime of the individual.

Though we believe that the student should be removed from his or her destructive environment, it is our conviction that the Leadership Academy should be located within the community it is designed to serve. It should be a true "point of light." An important component of the school program would be for the Academy's students to provide service to the community by participating in cleaning, repairing, beautifying, and building projects.

Literature Review

The disparity that exists between the achievement of children from high socioeconomic status (SES) and low SES backgrounds is well documented (Ascik, 1984; Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfield, & York, 1966). This is especially true of students in Louisiana public schools (Caldas, in press; Franklin & Crone, 1992). Low SES schools are often stigmatized as lacking in discipline and having low achievement levels. In other words, these schools are considered ineffective and undesirable. Consequently, parents who have the financial and/or physical means to do so often avoid the placement of their children in these schools.

However, not all low SES schools fit this mold. In a case study of a successful low SES African-American school, Wilbur Brookover (1979) reported four characteristics which he believed contributed to the school's success. The first of these was discipline and order. A second factor noted was the limited number of noninstructional activities during class time. Thirdly, every student was expected to achieve regardless of their background. Finally, teachers were mutually supportive of each other, as well as receiving a great deal of parental support.

In another case study of a successful, predominately African-American school, researchers found that in addition to stressing achievement and discipline, the principal closed the school campus to outside visitors and required students to stay on campus throughout the day (Ascik, 1984). The school also exhibited a family type climate in order to provide a stable environment for the students. The staff felt that this was important, especially since many of these students came from homes of poverty.

The LLA design emphasizes the tenets of discipline, time-on-task during class time, close knit student groupings, and high expectations for all students regardless of their background. Moreover, these tenets would be exercised within a structured atmosphere of caring for the total individual.

Many within the education community are calling for a restructuring of our schools and education in general. This new wave of reform is calling for total reorganization with a different set of expectations and incentives (Sheingold, 1991). The most recent reform efforts have included incorporating a longer school day. The LLA program would incorporate an extended day and lengthened school year in order to maximize the academy's benefits to students, and reduce student exposure to the destructive effects of their external environment. Moreover, one option of our design provides for residential facilities for older students in much the same way that highly successful traditional military academies do.

In addition to the presence of several other factors, Sheingold (1991) states that to ensure change in the present educational system schools must undergo a complete change from the status quo. Restructuring must include such things as giving teachers more authority with school management, a strategy which is connected to greater achievement in inner-city minority schools (Hill, Foster, & Gendler, 1992). Authority and accountability must be at the same level. Schools should be deciding how to get the job done, and the central office and school boards should provide the necessary assistance to accomplish these goals, and not hinder innovation with bureaucratic regulations. In other words, those who run the school must have the necessary power to make changes necessary to meet the needs of the students and the community.

Many educators are discovering the importance of creating small communities within which students can be known and valued as individuals. Indeed, researchers have found that school size, community ownership of the school, and the ability to attract good teachers are associated with school effectiveness (Ascik, 1984). Our design would not only invest the school plant with greater autonomy from local and state regulation, it would foster a strong sense of community through its design and size which are tailored to foster intense bonding between students and faculty.

Given that the LLA is a design for disadvantaged urban children, and that in Louisiana this population is disproportionately African-American, the LLA's student population will likely be a majority African-American. Concerns over racially segregated African-American schools have been dealt with in the research base (Ascher, 1992; Leake & Leake, 1992). For example, Leake and Leake point out that 63 percent of all African-American students are already attending schools with over 50 percent minority student enrollment. Moreover these two researchers stress the positive aspects of a segregated African-American "immersion" school which can focus on the unique needs of African-American students.

Both Leake and Leake as well as Ascher describe the movement within certain urban school systems to create these "immersion" schools designed to serve the African-American community. These schools are staffed based on experiences and talent rather than race and gender. The design includes platooning teachers and students, as well as involving staff in after school and weekend programs for both students and parents. In addition, these type schools will provide mentors from the community for teachers and students. Immersion schools are also designed to be

focal points of their communities, serving as liaisons between the community and certain social agencies such as health care providers.

Previous reform efforts mandated procedures, not results; methods, not outcomes. Current restructuring efforts stress the results produced by the implemented actions, not the actions themselves. *Schools must be responsible for demonstrating their effectiveness to the public* (Darling, Hammond, & Ascher, 1991). The LLA design stresses outcomes over almost everything else, a tact which has proven highly successful in Catholic and special public high schools where African-American students score above the national mean (Hill, Foster, & Gendler, 1990). Four outcomes stressed by the LLA design are student. . .

- 1.) *understanding of material read*
- 2.) *ability to locate, retrieve, and interpret information*
- 3.) *ability to identify and solve problems*
- 4.) *ability to work collaboratively*

Additionally, these outcomes will not be learned in a vacuum, as they are in many public schools, but within the context of an effort by the school to aggressively foster the following student values and attitudes:

- 1.) *self-worth and dignity*
- 2.) *respect for the property and rights of self and others*
- 3.) *diligent study and hard work*
- 4.) *honesty*

David (1991) identifies four points necessary to create change within the educational system. First, those most directly involved—parents, educators, public officials, and business leaders—must be provided a reason or justification for change and invited to change. Second, the authority and flexibility must be at lower levels. This calls for deregulation at the state and federal levels shifting more control to the local level. Third, schools and local officials need an awareness of current research findings and the availability of expert assistance with their individual efforts. Fourth, time must be set aside to allow districts, schools, and communities to implement restructuring plans.

Rapid, massive changes to the current educational system are not likely to occur. However, if the general public can be shown that good sound alternatives to the current system exist, then modifications are possible in selective areas where they are needed most. Our proposal is one such alternative which targets the urban inner-city where conventional school designs have failed.

Grade Levels Served: School will begin as pre-k to sixth grade elementary school, and have one higher grade per year added until it has a pre-K to 12th grade structure. The school serves male and female students. One option is to have an all male school.

Justification: The sooner intensive intervention is provided for the most disadvantaged students, the better the chances of ensuring their success in academics and life. This is especially true for African-American children, where oppression, discrimination, and a disadvantaged background seem to have a cumulative effect over time (Boykin, 1986; Caldas, in press; Gougis, 1986). Beginning with just elementary grades will allow time to work out imperfections in the system as the school is gradually expanded. Moreover, students who have been in the school at the elementary level when they are more receptive to an innovative learning environment will adapt much more readily to the program at the secondary level than will new students. Additionally, those who move through the system will become more ideal role models for new students who enter the system each year.

Governance:

As currently proposed, the LLA would not be under the jurisdiction of any local school district. Like the Louisiana School for the Arts and Sciences in Natchitoches, it would be funded directly by the Louisiana State Legislature. A board, members of which are appointed by different agencies and legislative bodies, is responsible for hiring a superintendent who directly oversees all activities at the school. Board members must possess a minimum of a bachelor's degree. The

superintendent preferably holds a Ph.D., or has extensive experience in military school administration. He is in charge of hiring and discharging faculty and staff members.

Rationale: The less outside regulation an urban minority school must submit to, the more flexible it can be in meeting the unique needs of its students (Hill, Wise, & Shapiro, 1989).

Building Facilities:

Acquired through renovation/conversion of abandoned inner-city educational or other facilities. The school can have either a day-only or a residential program. The concept of total immersion would suggest a residential program. However, such a program would increase the complexity and cost of the school. In order to be as comprehensive as possible, this proposal is presented in terms of a residential program. A day-only program would be a simplified version of this design.

Justification: The inner-city has a disproportionate number of abandoned facilities which would be relatively inexpensive to obtain, and would be located in the target community.

Classroom Arrangement:

A student/teacher ratio of 15:1. Except in upper grades where some departmentalization is necessary, the classroom, or "cohort" remains together through much of the academic day. The cohort is the fundamental social unit of

the school. Cohort leaders are chosen from within the cohort and are rotated on a periodic basis (e.g., weekly) in order to provide all students with leadership experience. This arrangement also allows teachers to identify those students who have natural leadership ability, so that it can subsequently be fostered. Each cohort has its own unique insignia and banner. Cohorts compete for academic and sports awards with other cohorts. Awards can be displayed as ribbons strung from the cohort's banner. Several cohorts form a division, which also competes with other divisions.

Justification: Socially and economically disadvantaged students perform markedly better in small groups. Cohorts serve as healthy substitutes for gangs, negative peer group pressure, and families for those from intolerable home situations (Ascher, 1992). As tightly-knit cohorts achieve success in intra-cohort completion, individual group member self-esteem is likely to rise. A favorable self-concept is a strong defense against delinquent behavior (Caldas, 1990). Pressures to conform to campus philosophy and rules will operate most strongly through the cohort.

Schedule: (M-F)

- * Morning: Reveille, Breakfast, & Academics
- * Early afternoon: Lunch, P.E., Drill, work details (school and community)
- * Later afternoon: Intramural cohort competition
- * Evening: Supper, study time, free time, taps
- * Saturday: community work details, study time, organized recreational activities
- * Sunday: opportunity for visitors, furloughs for outstanding students, field days,

banquets with family and friends; attend church (one option is for the school to have a non-denominational "devotional" of some kind on Sundays wherein inspirational speakers are invited to address the group).

Student Selection Procedures:

- * Initial physical and academic testing/screening.
- * LEP students must attain a minimum score on English screening test.
- * No special education.
- * Only neighborhood students.
- * Students only admitted at beginning of fall or spring semesters.
- * Parents/guardians must sign contract agreeing to the terms of all campus regulations for their charges.

Health Clinic:

The LLA has an on-campus comprehensive health clinic. It is staffed by permanently assigned nurses and a school psychologist. Medical interns visit the clinic on a periodical basis. The clinic is equipped to provide vaccinations, eye and ear screening, and thorough physical examinations. It is also equipped to collect blood and breath samples to detect drug use, which will also act as a deterrent to drug abuse. A holistic approach toward health education is emphasized, which includes sexuality education.

Justification: Early detection and treatment of health problems is critical among a population which has unequal access to health insurance and quality health care.

Moreover, effective learning is unlikely to take place before the rudiments of good health are attended to. Finally, attending to the human sexuality issues and concerns of adolescents in a comprehensive fashion can provide tremendous future benefits to both the individual and society (Caldas, 1993 A; Caldas, 1993 B). These benefits include not only decreased unintended teenage pregnancy and childbearing, but the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases including AIDS.

Curriculum:

- * At higher grades, able students are required to take a course load which will permit entrance into the state flagship university, LSU.
- * All able students are required to take physical education.
- * All students required to take health and family education (parenting education at higher grade levels required)
- * All students required to participate in orientation courses in campus discipline, etiquette, and ethics:
 - a. how, when, and what type of uniform to wear.
 - b. how to address instructors, classmates, and others
 - c. campus honor code (honesty, integrity, responsibility)
- * Driver's education required at higher grades.
- * All high school students take the ACT
- * Assessment mechanisms identify students who are able to take an Advanced Placement (AP) curriculum and off campus college courses.
- * Performance assessment part of entire school testing program.
- * CLEP (College Level Examination Program) tests to determine who is eligible for

college credit.

* Leadership education offered as part of JROTC program.

Justification: The curriculum is designed to develop each student to his/her greatest potential, and provide the foundation for a highly functional, successful life after leaving the LLA. The curriculum also addresses the problem of the disintegrating family unit in lower SES urban areas. By providing the student with a stable living/learning environment in combination with instruction in successful family/parenting skills, the school will promote the future establishment of stable, long-lived family unions, breaking the dysfunctional family cycle for some students. It is designed to identify, nurture, and prepare the most capable students, regardless of race, for a successful university experience, and future community, state, and national leadership.

School Maintenance:

* Cohorts participate in school upkeep on rotating schedule (e.g., one week they clean grounds, one week they clean dishes, one week they clean floors).

* cohort work details are supervised by skilled maintenance personnel.

Justification: work responsibility, teamwork, pride and ownership in school developed;

Cohort/Division Competition Field Days:

- * Formal intra-cohort sports competition days are scheduled (e.g., every Sunday).
- * Cohorts compete with each other in team sports, and are provided opportunities to win ribbons which can be displayed from their cohort standards.
- * Parents/guardians are invited to attend.

Disciplinary Policies:

- * the goal of all disciplinary action is behavior modification.
- * no corporal punishment is permitted
- * students are awarded merits/demerits for behavior.
- * punishment for demerits can include running laps, extra work details, non-participation in field day events.
- * awards for merits can include badges/ribbons, extra privileges, group recognition, etc.
- * in appropriate instances, cohort can be disciplined for actions of individuals
- * The strongest incentive for good behavior will be cohort peer pressure
- * habitual offenders will be removed from school.

Justification: Awards will be attractive and coveted enough to discourage much misbehavior. The school climate and peer pressure to conform to it will clearly define misbehavior as deviancy. Concrete correspondence between actions and awards/punishments will be established.

Uniforms:

- * Uniforms will be worn at all times on campus, and during specified times off campus as well.

- * All dress items will be issued students from school's quartermaster
- * Dress blue uniforms will be worn during specified formal school functions.
- * Greens will be worn while attending class.
- * Camouflaged utilities will be worn during work details.
- * Athletic gear will be standard sweats, standard tennis shoes, and standard shorts.
- * badges, patches, and pins will be designed for various awards, achievements and designations.
- * school emblem ("LLA" in eagle's clutches) will be displayed on hats and other clothing articles
- * Hair cuts will conform to a predefined standard.

Justification: Wearing of uniform clothing will encourage positive cohort, division, and school identification (Ascher, 1992). It will also have a democratizing effect: students will have to distinguish themselves by merit, not by the expense or style of their attire. It will also provide students avenue for displaying personal, cohort, and division achievements through wearing of badges and medals.

Teacher Selection Process:

- * teachers must volunteer for assignment to LLA
- * teachers are selected and hired by school superintendent.
- * qualifications:
 - at least a masters degree

- at least a 3.0 GPA in undergraduate studies
- certified by state of Louisiana to teach designated subject area.
- * teachers paid 10% higher than local district salary schedule
- * at least 50% of faculty is male
- * teacher racial makeup as much like community as possible

Justification: Excellence in student achievement requires an excellent teaching staff. Higher pay will attract excellent teachers. High GPA is at least partially indicative of excellence in academics. Male teachers provide role models for male students. African-American teachers provide appropriate role models for African-Americans.

Counseling:

- * all students are assigned to a counselor who acts as an advocate for the student.
- * counselors possess a minimum of a masters in agency counseling, and preferably a Ph.D.

Awards:

- * "superintendent's list" - a 3.0 nine weeks GPA qualifies a student for this recognition - its privileges include a pin to be worn on uniform, and special furlough leave.
- * "cohort superintendent's list" - an aggregate cohort GPA of 3.0 qualifies all members of a cohort for this distinction - its privileges include a special cohort pin to be worn by all members, as well as a banner to be displayed on cohort standard

during subsequent nine week period.

* cohort/division field day award - a distinction accorded the cohort and division with the highest aggregate score during a regularly scheduled field day - to be displayed from cohort and division standard until subsequent field day. Special privileges attached.

Substance Abuse Regulations:

* no drug use or abuse will be tolerated (alcohol is a drug):

- a random sample students from the list of all high school students will be required to deliver blood/urine samples at various periods throughout the academic year.

- targeted sampling: should a faculty member suspect that a student is using illicit drugs/alcohol, that student may be requested to undergo testing for drug use

* no tobacco use by students will be permitted

* first time offenders for drug use will be required to participate in-house drug rehabilitation program.

* second time drug offenders will be dismissed from LLA

Budget

At \$8,000 per student and 460 students in a residential program the school would cost approximately \$3,680,000 per year to operate.

To be developed. . .

- * Particulars of on-campus housing.
- * Budget and funding sources
- * Merit/demerit point award structure
- * Student assessment/assignment mechanisms
- * Summer programs
- * Weekend leave/furlough policies (if any)

Issues to be resolved:

- * How will pregnancy be dealt with?
- * How will marriage be dealt with?
- * Initial grade structure
- * Involvement of JROTC
- * Gender composition of school
- * Residential component of school

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